

REMARKS

The Examiner is thanked for the Official Action mailed December 11, 2003. This amendment and request for reconsideration is intended to be fully responsive to the Official Action.

In the Official Action, claims 1, 6 and 10 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(a, e) as being anticipated by WO 00/67972 A1 (WO '972). Claims 1, 6, and 10 were also rejected under 102(a,e) as anticipated by U.S. Patent 4,275,027 to Luck. Claims 2-5 were rejected as obvious under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) in view of WO '972. Claim 8 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over WO '972 in view of U.S. Patent 6,409,856 to Wiemann. Claims 2-5, 8 and 11 were also rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Luck in view of Wiemann. Claims 11, 13-16, and 19-20 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over WO '972 in view of Wiemann and U.S. Patent 6,409,856 to Himmelheber. Claims 13-16 and 19-20 were also rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Luck in view of Wiemann and Himmelheber. Claims 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 21 and 22 not elected and were withdrawn by the Examiner.

With regard to independent claim 1, claim 1 has been amended to add the steps of trimming the mat to a pre-selected height using a first rotary scalper and creating a softboard by pre-pressing the mat between first and second platens. Claim 1 has also been amended to include a pressure regimen wherein the softboard is formed by pressing

the mat with first and second platens at a first pressure, and subsequently pressing the softboard with third and fourth platens at a second higher pressure to produce a cellulosic product.

None of the prior art references, including Luck and WO '972, describe initially creating a softboard by pressing unconsolidated cellulosic material between first and second platens. Further, the prior art references do not disclose using a rotary scalper, as defined in the current specification and drawings, to reduce the cellulosic mat to a constant thickness. On page 6, lines 6-10 of the current specification, a rotary scalper is defined as "a rotating axle from which a plurality of blades extend". Both Himmelheber and Wiemann disclose rotary brushes rather than bladed scalpels, as described in Wiemann column 1, lines 47-65, and Himmelheber column 3, lines 70-75.

With regard to dependent claim 3, the prior art does not disclose the use of a suction system in combination with the conveyor and bladed rotary scalpels. The combination of the suction system and the bladed scalpels provides better reliability and control of the form of the mat and ensures a compact and uniform distribution of cellulosic material thereby preventing pitting and voids in the resulting softboard and ultimately resulting in a superior quality product.

With regard to dependent claims 6 and 8, claim 8 claims a system whereby a second rotary scalper is used to machine the softboard. Even if the prior art disclosed a

system whereby the cellulosic mat is trimmed using a first rotary scalper (and it does not), the prior art certainly does not disclose a system comprising first and second rotary scalpels operating in tandem, wherein the second scalper is used to machine the softboard.

Based on the foregoing amendments and arguments, it is submitted that claims 1-12 are in condition for allowance.

With regard to amended independent claim 13, in the Office Action, the Examiner indicates that it would have been obvious to employ a conveyer belt having a suction device because this type of system “is notoriously common in the board making art”. The Applicant respectfully requests evidence of a system whereby a vacuum is created on the surface of a conveyor belt to retain unconsolidated resin and cellulosic material while the upper portion of the material is removed by a rotary scalper to provide precise control of the caliper of the mat, as specifically claimed in independent claim 13.

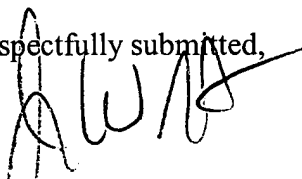
With regard to claim 16, also as discussed above, the prior art does not disclose first and second rotary scalpels wherein the first rotary scalper removes the upper layer of an unconsolidated mat and the second rotary scalper machines the surface of mat after a pre-pressing step.

Based on the foregoing amendments and arguments, it is submitted that claims 13-21 are in condition for allowance.

With regard to new independent claim 23, claim 23 includes the claimed subject matter recited in claims 1-22, and for the reasons stated above, it is submitted that new independent claim 23 is also in condition for allowance.

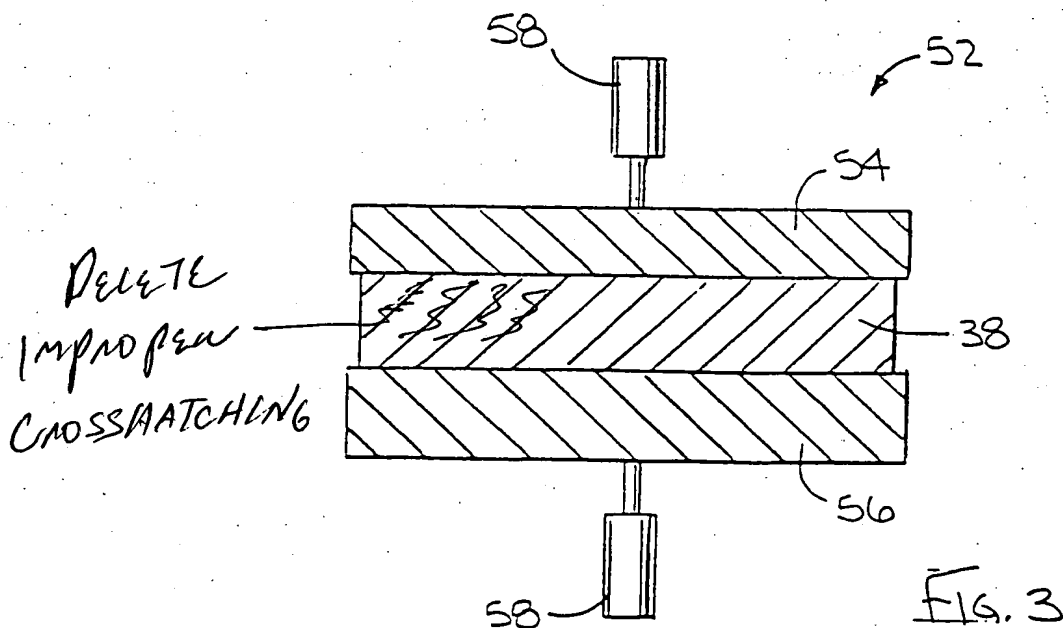
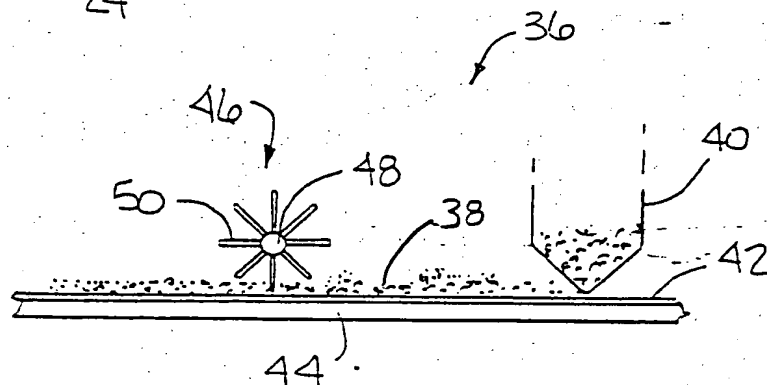
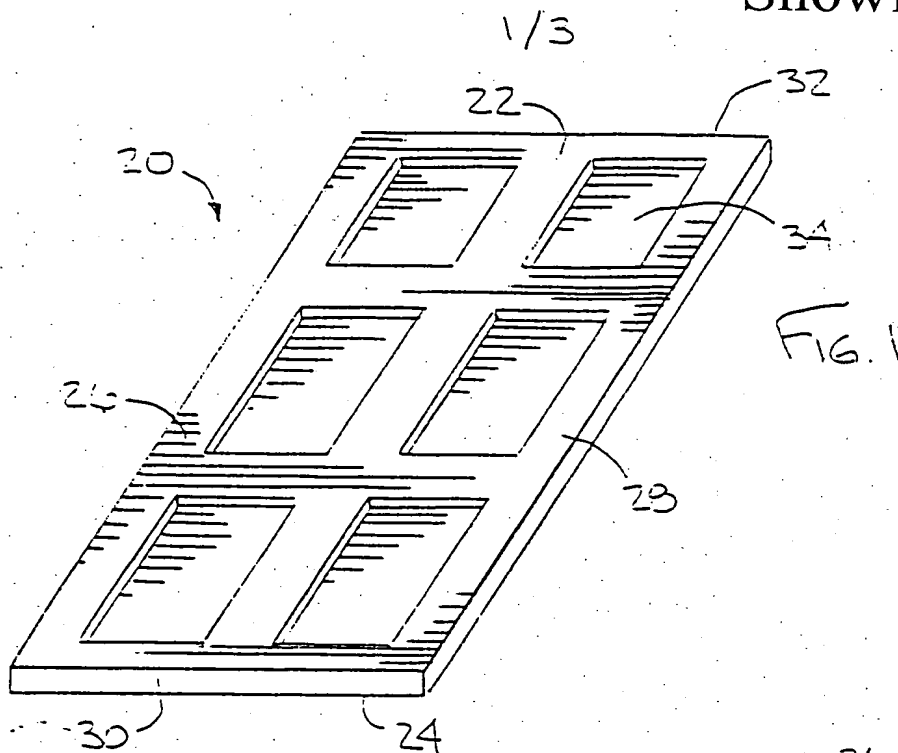
It is respectfully submitted that the foregoing arguments and amendments place the application in condition for allowance. Should the examiner believe that additional discussion is required, the examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the local telephone number listed below. The Commissioner is authorized to charge any required fees to deposit account no. 50-0548.

Respectfully submitted,



Joseph W. Berenato, III
Registration No. 30,546
Attorney for Applicant

Liniak, Berenato & White, LLC
6550 Rock Spring Drive, Ste. 240
Bethesda, Maryland 20817
(301)896-0600



Annotated Sheet 2/2
Showing Changes

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FIG. 4

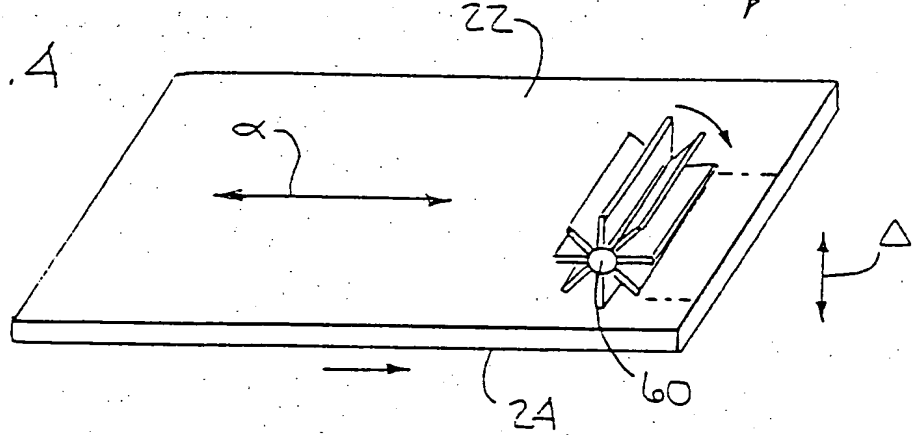


FIG. 5

